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Seventy-first year

Provisional

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Wednesday, 24 February 2016, 10.10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Suárez Moreno	(Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of))
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	China	Mr. Zhao Yong
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Yoshikawa
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Spain	Mr. Martínez Montes
	Ukraine	Mr. Vitrenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Power
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015) (S/2016/156)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015) (S/2016/156)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/156, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015).

I now give the floor to Mr. O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien: Next month we will mark a grim anniversary. The brutal conflict will have torn Syria apart for five long years. It has been a relentless period of violence and destruction. The Syrian people have seen their country reduced to rubble, loved ones killed or injured and millions of people displaced either inside the country or in the region and beyond. They have suffered far too much and for far too long. The international community watched as Syria became one of the largest and most destructive crises of our times, with the majority of the population — some 13.5 million people — in dire need of protection and humanitarian assistance.

The announcement by the Chairs of the International Syria Support Group — the United States and the Russian Federation — of a nationwide cessation of hostilities, scheduled to come into effect this weekend, is a welcome development and a long-awaited signal of hope to the Syrian people. I echo the call of the Secretary-General for the parties to abide by the terms of the agreement, to bring about an immediate reduction in violence as a first step towards a more durable ceasefire and to create the conditions necessary for increased delivery of humanitarian aid.

I would like to take this opportunity to update the Council in detail on the most up-to-date information on humanitarian access.

As of 17 February, United Nations and Syrian Arab Red Crescent convoys had reached the following towns as part of the four towns agreement: 62 trucks to Madaya, reaching 40,000 beneficiaries; 3 trucks to Zabadani, reaching 1,000 beneficiaries; and 18 trucks to Fu'ah and Kafraya, reaching 20,000 beneficiaries. The convoys have preceded without any major security incident, although there have been delays in delivery as parties disagree over the terms of the agreement. The second and last part of the deliveries is tentatively planned for 28 February. The United Nations has supplies ready to be loaded and delivered. Facilitation by all parties, including the relevant letters from the Government of Syria, must be provided. As part of the agreements facilitated through discussions in Munich earlier this month, we have been able to deliver 62 trucks in Madimayet, reaching 40,000 people. There is another convoy planned through Madimayet, which must happen this week. Again, it requires facilitation by all parties, including the relevant letters from the Government.

Despite those achievements, the process of delivery has not been straightforward. For example, the second Madimayet convoy left the warehouse on Sunday, 21 February at 8 p.m. local time. By Tuesday at 1 a.m. local time, we still had trucks waiting outside the checkpoint to enter the town. Brave and dedicated humanitarian workers slept in trucks in adverse weather, waiting patiently to get help to the people that needed it. Eventually supplies were delivered, and the team worked through the night to unload the supplies. Their bravery and commitment is humbling, and I salute them all. I would like to remind the Council that Madimayet is a mere 15- to 20-minute drive from central Damascus. There is no reason that the mission should take over 48 hours to reach the people who need help. It is a clear violation of the safe, unhindered, unimpeded access that the Security Council has continually called for through its resolutions and other statements.

Finally, in Kafr Batna, in eastern Ghuta, 15 trucks delivered assistance to 10,000 people. Again, that was not without complications. My team received approval from the Government at 5.30 p.m. on 21 February to deliver assistance to over 44,0000 people in several towns in eastern Ghuta. After extensive negotiations, the United Nations team finally departed in the early afternoon on 23 February, and was only actually able to deliver to one town — Kafr Batna. The date of the next convoy is yet to be approved. Again, I insist on immediate approval to allow the convoys to deliver. We need immediate approval for the next round of convoys, which will deliver to eastern Ghutah, Homs, Aleppo and southern Syria.

Health supplies for some 30,000 people have been denied for the convoys by the Ministry of Health. The Resident Coordinator will submit an official request to the Government for all medical items that were removed to be included in future convoys. The Resident Coordinator is also putting together a proposal to the Government of Syria to reduce the number of procedures and the length of time needed for inter-agency convoys move. Humanitarian operations cannot continue to be bogged down by unnecessary and unacceptable restrictions, obstructions and deliberate delays that are costing people their lives. The number, scope and complexity of bureaucratic and other obstacles that are placed in the path of simple aid deliveries are staggering. To move a single truck, United Nations teams on the ground need to acquire multiple layers of approvals from officials at various different levels, necessitating repeated rounds of negotiations over everything from the target location, the amount and type of aid supplies, the date, the time and the route to take. When approvals are forthcoming, they are often not respected or adequately implemented. In order for people in dire need to receive the assistance they so desperately require, the system must be urgently simplified.

The United Nations has also begun to use airdrops as a means of humanitarian delivery in Syria. Although there are a number of operational risks associated with airdrops, we recognize that there are benefits to that approach in some areas of Syria as a last resort. Earlier this morning, a World Food Programme plane dropped the first cargo of 21 tons of items into Deir ez-Zor. We have received initial reports from the Syrian Arab Red Crescent team on the ground that pallets have landed in the target area as planned.

In summary, the United Nations and its partners have reached 110,000 people in besieged areas. We have approval to reach a further 230,000 people, including through the airdrops in Deir ez-Zor. But we are still waiting for approval for an additional 170,000 people. We expect those approvals to happen immediately. And, more broadly, the use of siege and starvation as a method of war must cease immediately. The main responsibility for doing so rests with the parties maintaining the sieges, but it is shared by those who put civilians in harm's way by using them as shields for military activities in besieged areas.

I cannot emphasize enough how high the stakes are at this moment in the conflict. The Syrian people — who are rightly sceptical of the international community's desire and ability to bring about an end to this hideous war after years of inaction — need to see an immediate difference in their daily lives on the ground because, up until this point, it is they who continue to bear the brunt of this crisis as violence has become more widespread, systematic and extreme. Since the start of the year, thousands of civilians have been killed, injured or displaced as a result of air strikes, barrel bombs, shelling, mortars, rockets, car bombs, improvised explosive devices and suicide attacks, day after day, right across the country.

This month alone, it is estimated that several hundred people have been killed and over 70,000 displaced due to intense aerial bombardment in Aleppo governorate. Heavy fighting and aerial bombardment also continued in other parts of the country, including parts of Idlib, Homs, rural Damascus and Dar'a. All too often, that included attacks on civilian infrastructure and basic services — including medical facilities, schools, bakeries, places of worship and internally displaced person camps, with a devastating impact on hundreds of thousands of civilians. On 15 February, on one single day, seven health-care facilities were attacked in Idlib, Aleppo and Dar'a, reportedly by Government and allied forces. Numerous civilians, including medical staff, were killed or injured, and the facilities largely destroyed. In Idlib alone it is estimated that some 40,000 people will be left without access to medical services as a result.

Groups designated as terrorist have similarly continued their indiscriminate attacks on civilian-populated areas. A few days ago, car-bomb attacks for which responsibility was claimed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant reportedly killed more than 155

people in Damascus and the city of Homs. In January, similar attacks in the same locations killed dozens more. Meanwhile, non-State armed groups have continued shelling populated areas of Damascus, killing and injuring many civilians over the past few weeks.

It is hard to believe that this conflict can be resolved as long as there continues to be a complete absence of protection for civilians. The agreement on a cessation of hostilities must finally and unequivocally produce what the Council's resolutions and the basic tenets and obligations that apply under international law have not been able to achieve so far — an immediate end to all targeted or indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, and improved protection of civilians. Enough is enough. This brutality must be brought to an end.

Despite the intensified fighting, the United Nations and its partners have continued to scale up assistance to people in need, albeit at great personal risk to their staff. Last month, the United Nations and its partners reached millions of people in need with assistance through all available routes. The World Food Programme, for example, delivered food for 3.6 million people. UNICEF provided water, sanitation and hygiene supplies for more than 2 million people, and the World Health Organization delivered nearly 660,000 treatments.

This month, significant amounts of supplies were delivered through cross-border operations authorized by the Council. During the first three weeks of February, food assistance reached some 960,000 people, which represents a 48 per cent increase as compared to the same period in January. Health supplies were also delivered for some 300,000 people in February. Large, multi-truck convoys are crossing the three border crossings of Bab Al-Salam, Bab Al-Hawa and Ar Ramtha on a nearly daily basis. We will continue to stay and deliver, but we remain concerned about the impact of fighting and insecurity on humanitarian access and operational space, in particular to the eastern areas of the city of Aleppo. This fragile access to people in need must be safeguarded at all costs.

Let me be frank. While the United Nations and its partners are ready to take advantage of any opportunity to reach people in need, granting access should never be dependent upon political negotiations or ad hoc deals on the ground. The protection of civilians and the facilitation of humanitarian assistance are legal obligations that are incumbent upon all parties to the conflict at all times and for all types of assistance. That is a fundamental and irrefutable tenet of international humanitarian law and it must be respected. In that regard, I once again call urgently on the Government of Syria to approve without delay the more than 40 requests outstanding for inter-agency convoys to deliver assistance to hard-to-reach and besieged areas. I also call on non-State armed groups and listed terrorist groups to fulfil their obligations.

There are no winners in the Syrian conflict. Everyone is losing. But the highest price is being paid by Syrian men, women and children who are seeing their country, homes and families torn apart. This war has to end. As much as we try, the delivery of humanitarian assistance can address only the symptoms, not the root causes. The international community and the parties to the conflict must seize the momentum created around the nationwide cessation of hostilities to bring a political solution to the crisis. I cannot stress enough that we must not let this opportunity pass. We cannot take away that glimmer of hope from the people who need it most.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Under-Secretary-General O'Brien for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. O'Brien has described a brutal situation in my country and I am in full agreement with his description. However, I differ with him in ascribing the manifestations and reasons for that brutality. Today I will therefore try to shed some light on the reality of that brutality, which is shedding my people's blood, destroying our infrastructure and bringing all kinds of terrorists to my country. As a matter of fact, this brutal situation has been contributed to by some States that sit on the Security Council.

It is regrettable that, despite the fact that about five years have passed since the crisis began in Syria, some Governments still insist on using the humanitarian situation as a justification in order to achieve their narrow political ends, as if the suffering of the Syrian people were a mere commodity to be used for trafficking and political blackmail by this or that Government. The extent of the hypocrisy and cheap political exploitation of human suffering may perhaps be made clear through the way in which those States treat the humanitarian

situation in Syria by comparison to their treatment of such situations in other States.

The Security Council has adopted 15 resolutions on the situation in Syria, four of which relate to the humanitarian situation in the country. Every year it has held dozens of formal and informal meetings, now almost daily. However, in that time we have had no resolutions dealing with the disastrous humanitarian situations in Palestine, Libya, Yemen or Somalia, despite the fact that in one Security Council meeting Mr. O'Brien indicated that the humanitarian situation in Yemen was far worse than that in Syria: more than 80 per cent of the Yemeni people are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.

As a Government, we cannot deny that there is a humanitarian crisis in Syria. Millions of people are displaced, refugees or disadvantaged. However, we deplore the mistaken way that the crisis has been dealt with so far. Looking at the situation from a partial perspective, in isolation from the external, political, military and economic interference in Syria, we do not deny the depth of the humanitarian crisis, as the Council well knows. However, we reject any suggestion that it can be dealt with seriously without dealing with the origins of and reasons for the crisis, which are rooted in the spread of armed terrorist groups supported from outside and their proliferation in our villages and cities while using civilians as human shields.

The Under-Secretary-General called such externally supported armed terrorist groups "non-State armed groups". We have witnessed no humanitarian crisis anywhere apart from the areas that those terrorist groups have entered. Adding insult to injury is the fact that some States have imposed unilateral coercive measures on the Syrian people, thereby aggravating our suffering. In that regard, it is incomprehensible that some insist on denying the role of the Syrian Government, attempting to portray it as primarily responsible for the humanitarian crisis, as we heard just now in Mr. O'Brien's statement. The height of the paradoxical nature of this scenario is reached when some accuse the Syrian Government of besieging some areas with the aim of starving its own people.

However, they are unable to stop the continued outflow of armed terrorists and the financial support provided to them in the regions that they claim are being besieged by our Government. Those terrorist groups launch rocket attacks indiscriminately at civilian areas and carry out suicide bombings, as happened in Homs, Rif Dimashq and Hasakah. Other areas, such as Kafraya and Fu'ah, and, for the past three and a half years Dayr ez-Zor and Zahra, are besieged from the outside by terrorist groups, while others, such as in Madimayet, Madaya and Duma, are besieged internally by terrorists. The terrorists prevent the entry of humanitarian assistance or seize it for their own use or to resell it to civilians. We have not seen any images of so-called moderate terrorists starving. Have representatives ever seen in the media an image of a hungry terrorist in Syria? No, only the civilians are hungry. Terrorists are not hungry because they receive dollars and weapons. They come from all over the world and do not go hungry. However, civilians inevitably go hungry.

It has become clear that, in order to improve the humanitarian situation in Syria comprehensively and in a sustainable manner, the Government must abandon that misguided and failed approach. How can we put an end to the humanitarian crisis in Syria while the Erdoğan regime remains silent about the military attacks against the Syrian territories. uses Turkish territory, including the crossings used by the United Nations to provide humanitarian assistance, as a passageway for the transit of thousands of foreign terrorist fighters, supplies and weapons, and even uses humanitarian assistance convoys to hide them? That regime imprisons customs officers, judges and journalists who expose it. How can the humanitarian crisis be brought to an end when the Erdoğan regime brazenly uses the plight of refugees to blackmail European States to gain political and financial support?

Regrettably, some States on the Security Council provide cover for the Erdoğan regime. A few days ago those States refused a balanced draft resolution emphasizing the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria and rejecting external interference in its affairs and in the outflow of refugees. Those are all universally agreed principles that nobody can deny. However, after the adoption of 15 Security Council resolutions on Syria, some are trying complicate matters. It is as if Syria were seeking another five years to prudently analyse what is happening in its territory.

The Syrian Government is eager to extend all types of humanitarian assistance to all Syrians affected by the crisis wherever they are in its territory. That is our duty and we are committed to it. Therefore, the Syrian Government is open to coordinating and cooperating

with all States, United Nations entities, including the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and other international organizations working in Syria to carry out that process, without propaganda or attempts to demonize the Syrian Government. It is clear that our Government is doing its best to deliver assistance to its citizens wherever they are.

As a demonstration of this, the Syrian Government informed the United Nations on 16 February that it had agreed to allow the entry of humanitarian assistance convoys to Dayr ez-Zor, Kafraya, Fu'ah, Madaya, Madimayet, Zabadani and Kafr Batna. Those convoys are a continuation of other convoys that have already reached those regions and other areas and illustrate my Government's intention to facilitate the delivery of assistance to all people in need wherever they are in Syria. That was also emphasized by the Minister for Foreign affairs to Mr. De Mistura at his latest meeting with him in Damascus. The delay in providing consent and the so-called administrative bureaucracy mentioned by Mr. O'Brien is an indication of our eagerness to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian workers. We care about their safety and security and do not want any harm to befall them, such as, for example, a suicide bomber exploding himself in front of a humanitarian convoy vehicle. Yet, we are now back in the Council and are hearing a different description about what is happening.

Resolving the Syrian crisis requires two simultaneous approaches: first, combating terrorism and, secondly, a political approach. Based on that, the Syrian Government is committed to combating terrorism and is pressing ahead with a political approach. The delegation of Syria participated in the Geneva talks and demonstrated its seriousness and commitment to the talks, as witnessed by the Special Envoy himself. The problem there was that some States imposed the so-called Riyadh delegation as the sole negotiator with the single goal undermining those talks by means of direct instructions from those actors, in addition to considerable procedural gaps, in particular when it came to the representation of all elements of Syrian society outside and inside Syria. Those factors led to the failure of the most recent round of Geneva talks.

We are now demonstrating our seriousness and willingness to curb the bloodshed, restore security and stability and implement the will of our people to preserve our territorial integrity. We agreed to the cessation of hostilities agreement on the basis of the continuation of political efforts to combat the terrorism perpetrated by Da'esh, the Al-Nusra Front and other terrorist organizations, in accordance with the Russian and American announcement.

We are cooperating with the Russian side to determine the groups and areas that will be covered by the cessation of hostilities agreement. In that regard, we underscore the need to establish control over the borders, in particular the Syrian/Turkish border, and to put an end to the support provided by some States to the terrorist organizations, which enables them to build their capacities, in order to avoid jeopardizing that agreement. We emphasize the right of our armed forces to deter any violation by those groups against our Syrian citizens or our armed forces.

The ball is in the court of the other parties who still support terrorism, a military escalation and external interference and undermine the achievement of a political solution by imposing unacceptable preconditions.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.40 a.m.